



Tsunami Disaster: Health Information for Humanitarian Workers

On December 26, 2004 at 0058 hours GMT, a strong earthquake, with a magnitude of 8.9 on the Richter Scale, occurred off the west coast of Northern Sumatra (Aceh). A subsequent tsunami hit South and Southeast Asia and East Africa causing serious damage and loss of life. Several countries bordering the Indian Ocean were affected including Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Maldives, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Burma (Myanmar), Tanzania, Seychelles, Kenya, and Somalia. The following WHO website contains information about the earthquake and subsequent tsunami:

http://www.who.int/hac/crises/international/asia_tsunami/background/en/

There are numerous health risks posed by natural disasters. Humanitarian workers traveling to the affected countries need to be aware of these risks. Like all travelers, humanitarian workers should visit a [travel medicine clinic](#) prior to departure to ensure that they receive all recommended vaccinations and anti-malarial medications, etc. Health information and advice for travelers to affected regions have been posted on CDC's Travelers Health website (http://www.cdc.gov/travel/other/tsunami_sasia_2004.htm).

Because of their potential exposures, humanitarian workers are at greater risk than are tourists for developing illness and injuries. In addition, they should be aware of potential hazards such as displaced land mines in areas of prior conflict and security measures that may be imposed such as, curfews to prevent looting. Those who provide assistance should also pay attention to their mental health needs before, during, and after their time in the field. Moreover, because humanitarian workers' services are desperately needed, it is essential those workers remain healthy during their trip. This notice provides advice specific to the needs of humanitarian workers.

Humanitarian workers should plan for travel as if there will be no services, including no electricity, safe water, or food distribution systems, in the country they are visiting. They should try to pack to be as self-sufficient as possible and bring only those items necessary for their trip. Moreover, because of space limitations on conveyances to relief sites, only one bag or item per person may be allowed.

Humanitarian workers should learn as much as possible about the areas that they will be entering. State Department warnings should be reviewed and security restrictions adhered to. Providing humanitarian assistance is often a physically and mentally challenging task and only those in good physical condition should embark on these efforts.

In addition to packing a basic [travel health kit](#), humanitarian workers should bring the following items:

Food and water

- Bottled water or water filters/purification system/water purification tablets
- Non-perishable food items

Toiletries

- Toilet paper in a zip lock bag
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Sunblock (spf 15 or higher)
- Insect repellent containing DEET

Tsunami Disaster: Health Information for Humanitarian Workers

(continued from previous page)

- Menstrual supplies
- Extra pair of prescription glasses, copy of prescription
- Eyeglasses repair kit
- Contact lenses, lens cleaner, and eye glasses protective case
- Toothbrush/toothpaste
- Skin moisturizer
- Soap, shampoo
- Lip balm
- Razor, extra blades*
- Scissors*
- Nail clippers/tweezers*
- Q-tips, cotton swabs
- Sewing kit
- Laundry detergent
- Small clothes line/pins

Clothing

- Comfortable, light weight clothing
- Long pants
- Long sleeved shirts
- Hat
- Boots
- Shower shoes
- Rain gear
- Bandana/handkerchief
- Towel (highly absorbent, travel towels if possible)
- Gloves
Leather gloves if physical labor will be performed; rubber gloves if handling blood or body fluids

Activities of daily living

- Sunglasses
- Safety goggles
- Electricity converters
- Water proof watch
- Flashlight
- Spare batteries
- Knife, such as a Swiss Army Knife or Leatherman*

Security

- Money belt
- Cash
- Cell phone (with charger)
- Candles, matches, lighter in a ziplock bag
- Ziplock bags
- Extra passport style photos
- Photocopy of all important documents (bring copies and leave copies with employer and next of kin):
Next of kin contact, first page of passport, driver's license, travelers checks, immunization schedule, birth certificate, credit cards, diplomas/medical licenses, emergency telephone numbers, blood type, social security number, travel tickets.
- An item of comfort (i.e., family photo, spiritual or religious material)

January 2, 2005

Page 2 of 3

Tsunami Disaster: Health Information for Humanitarian Workers

(continued from previous page)

Shelter/site

- Mosquito bed net treated with permethrin

Information on country

- Maps
- General information (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>)

*packed in checked baggage, may be confiscated if in carry-on on commercial airliner

The following **safety precautions** should be taken prior to beginning work in the affected country:

- Never travel alone (utilize the “buddy” system)
- Have a means of communication such as a cell phone, satellite phone, or walkie-talkie, that is suitable for your environment
- Have a map and compass; plan your journey in advance
- Ensure personnel at base know where you are going
- Bring a flashlight and extra batteries
- Have emergency food and water (several liters per day per person)
- Have a first aid kit
- Have an emergency plan in the event of a mishap

On return from one of the affected areas, humanitarian workers who are unwell or who have become injured for any reason should receive a medical evaluation. This should include psychological support and counseling as necessary. Returning humanitarian workers should seek health care in the event of fever, rash, respiratory illness or any other unusual symptoms.

CDC is monitoring the situation closely. We recommend that humanitarian workers traveling to these regions check the Travelers Health webpage (<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>) and the U.S. Department of State web site (http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_tsunami.html) for updates and speak with their travel medicine physicians prior to travel. Additional information regarding health risks after natural disasters can be found at CDC's webpage (<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/>). Additional information about the humanitarian relief work in response to the tsunami can be found at <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf>.

For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/tsunamis, or call the CDC public response hotline at 888-246-2675 (English), 888-246-2857 (español), or 866-874-2646 (TTY).